The Role of Religion-based Civil Society Organizations as Peacebuilding Stakeholders in Mindanao

Mary Apple Joy M. Garcia, Kristine Anne B. De Venecia, Cathreen Zhen P. Aliposa

University of Santo Tomas

ABSTRACT

In the case of Mindanao, religion has been a cause for conflict and a path for reconciliation. Currently, it seems to be moving in a direction that promotes peace in the region, hence the growing presence of religious peacebuilders. This study then aimed to identify the contribution of religion-based civil society organizations (CSOs) in Mindanao. In the process, it also shed light on the current nature of religious peacebuilding in the region. The researchers used digital ethnography, and textual and discourse analysis in order to uncover and evaluate the peacebuilding efforts done by religious stakeholders. This study confirmed that religion-based CSOs aided in the mitigation of conflict in Mindanao and did not fuel further conflict, despite the common misconception that they did. They were also found to have evolved to include people of other faiths and other disciplines, which becomes more inclusive, sustainable, and holistic in the long run. Religion-based CSOs face challenges including the mistrust of Christians towards Muslims, injustices towards minorities, stereotypes found against different faith groups, unresolved historical conflicts, issues on land ownership, violent extremism, and political and economic underdevelopment in the region.

INTRODUCTION

The role of religion, especially Christianity and Islam in the Philippine context, has been known to have a presence when it comes to societal issues. In this case, several research studies have been published in regards to their interactions regarding the conflicts in Muslim Mindanao. Although the church has been a predominant figure in the rest of the country, Islam has been the primary way of living in the southernmost region. This had led to the dissonance between the Catholic Church and Mindanao in history, especially during the colonization of the Spaniards and Americans. Discussions about the roles of Christianity and Islam in the Mindanao conflict within the context of religion and peacebuilding may aid in the search for peace.

The rift between the Christians and Muslims worsened with the mismanagement of the government by continuing the policies of their colonial masters (Ochiai, 2016), discrimination against the Muslims due to the War on Terror, and the economic situation of Mindanao, which led to the region having the least developed provinces in the Philippines (Bacani & Mercado, 2011). With the majority of the nation as Christians, Muslims are the religious minority and often looked at as the "Other." On the other hand, the Muslims, due to history, believed that it was their duty to protect the integrity of Mindanao as a region of Islam.

The need to educate both sides and have a dialogue with one another arises. History has led them to believe that conversion may be the only solution to the problem. Fortunately, several religious leaders have organized interfaith dialogues with their Muslim and Christian siblings. Along with the evolution of the conflict, religious peacebuilders have also evolved. Many religious peacebuilders have realized the need to work with people across different faith orientations. In retrospect, the Mindanao conflict cannot be solved

through the macro-level stakeholders only, such as the government or international organizations. It also requires communication at the grassroots level with the general public. Hence, the methods of religion-based peacebuilders in Mindanao should be interdisciplinary and holistic. However, there is a lack of focus on the efforts of CSOs, particularly religion-based CSOs, perhaps due to the misconception that religion-based CSOs may trigger a re-emergence or escalation of the conflict. However, religion-based CSOs can be effective stakeholders in peacebuilding. Religion-based CSOs have their own approaches when it comes to peacebuilding. Therefore, respect for difference in perspectives have aided these stakeholders in their activities related to the resolution of the conflict. Once the citizens of Mindanao, whether Christian, Muslim, Lumad, or other, become the symbols of peace they dream of and accept the "Other," that may be the time when Mindanao finally becomes a more peaceful region.

Historical Context of Muslim and Christian Mindanao

The Philippines is known to have abundant natural resources and to be a strategic location for military and trade. This was what Spain and the United States saw in the country. Spain specified in their conquest that they journeyed to the East for Gold, God, and Glory. With that in their mind, they subjugated the natives of the Philippines. After the Treaty of Paris, the United States declared it their duty to civilize the Philippines and take them under their wings, with Christianity still the prime religion to be promoted.

Before the arrival of the Spaniards (1565-1898) at the shore of the Philippines, Islam had already promulgated in the Southern part of the Philippines. In 1450, Sulu had established the first sultanate of Mindanao while Maguindanao had its own sultanate with the unity of two Maguindanaon principalities in 1619 (Saleeby, 1963; Majul, 1973 as cited in Montiel, Rodil & de Guzman, 2012). By the time Miguel Lopez de Legazpi arrived in the Philippines in 1565, there were already two Muslim chiefs who established a fiefdom in Manila (Dellosa, 2012). As Christianity was being introduced to the archipelago, that will be called the Philippines later on, Islam provided the Muslim communities in the Southern region a collective identity and a sense of community (Majul, 1973, as cited in Montiel, et. al, 2012) that will aid them in resisting the foreign threats in the near-future. Spain, at this point, had a traumatic past concerning the Muslims who conquered and subjugated Spain from 711 C.E. This past haunted them even during the colonization of the Philippines as seen in their hostility towards the Muslims of Mindanao and the "Moro" label assigned to them based on the Moroccan Moors who invaded Southern Spain (Dellosa, 2012). Aside from the past which haunted Spain, the wars they had with the Muslims of the South were wars against *"guerraspiraticas"* or Moro pirates (Montiel, et. al, 2012). In the eyes of the Muslims, their retaliation was to be expected to protect their territories and allies.

Violence was commonplace in Mindanao during the Spanish colonization. Spain continued their attempts to invade the area and the Muslim natives retaliated, declaring *jihad.* Although the Muslims of Mindanao were not related to what happened in the Iberian Peninsula, Spain redirected their hatred towards them and continued their conquests in the South, especially in 1602 and 1627-1629 (Dellosa, 2012). The only escape the natives could have resorted to, that did not lead to death, was conversion to Christianity. If these Muslims converted, it would undo them as "Moros" in the eyes of the Spaniards. This was also the time when, in the Christian religion, Muslims were distorted into something evil. What worsened this tension between the Christians and Muslims were how the Spaniards sent Filipino Christians to fight the Muslims and in return, the Muslims attacked Spanish-controlled Filipino communities (Montiel, et. al, 2012). A cultural product that was a propaganda against the Muslims was "moro-moro" wherein Christians and Muslim Moros were pitted against each other and the Moros are always depicted as villains (Dellosa, 2012). The efforts of the Spaniards resulted in deep-seated mutual animosities, distrust and hatred which stuck with both Christians and Muslims from generation to generation until the current period.

The United States (1898-1946) entered the scene without any warning for the natives of the Philippines. The country, along with its citizens and resources, were sold to the Americans, as if they were only Spanish

property and vassals. At this point, the Philippines declared independence from their Spanish colonizers six months before the Treaty of Paris, which stated otherwise. The sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao, and the *Pat a Pongampong ko Ranao* ("Four Sovereign States of Lanao") were also never colonized by the Spaniards and the *Lumad*, indigenous people of Mindanao, avoided contact from Spain and remained free (Montiel, et. al, 2012). This attachment of the Moros to the Philippines can be considered one of the root causes of their struggle as this happened without their consent. Although the Philippines pushed for independence, critics said that Christian Filipinos could not establish their own government due to the 'wild tribes' with Moros used as an example (Dellosa, 2012). They believed that these 'wild tribes' had no right to govern or were incapable to govern.

Christianity still reigned supreme in the country during this time and Americans viewed themselves as superior to the Filipino natives in every way, like the Spaniards did. They treated anything other than Christianity, especially Islam, as a threat to their civilization and progress for the Philippines. American even classified the Philippine islands into two broad categories – Christian and non-Christian – which could also connote civilized and uncivilized, respectively (Rodil, 1994 as cited in Montiel, et. al, 2012). The non-Christians included the Moros and the Wild Tribes and affected how the law viewed these people.

Even after the independence of the Philippines from the American colonizers in 1946, the local government, which comprised of Christians, still promulgated the policies of their colonial masters (Dellosa, 2012), leading to the oppression of the minority religions, with Islam as the main target. Even with the call of 'Moroization' in the midst of the Filipinization of the central government and resistance from being integrated into the Philippine state, the Moros were still included in the 1935 Constitution and were forced to be part of the new Philippine republic (Montiel, et. al, 2012).

Several decades after colonization, the Mindanao conflict became known to be the second oldest in the world, second to the one between North and South Sudan (Schiavo-Campo and Judd, 2005). Due to civil war and armed struggles, the number of deaths is estimated to be at 120,000 (Schiavo-Campo and Judd, 2005). The "domestic refugee" (internally displaced peoples) population was estimated to be more than two million (Schiavo-Campo and Judd, 2005). Historically, there was also the neglect of indigenous peoples of Mindanao (collectively called "*Lumads*") by the colonizers, Christian immigrants and the Moros, which led to their displacement. In 2014, the average GDP growth rate in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was 3% (Ochiai, 2016), half of the national average which was 6%. The causes of the continuation of the Mindanao conflict can be seen in how the government of the Philippines treated Mindanao with policies which put the southern region in a disadvantage.

Religious Peacebuilding Initiatives in the Mindanao conflict

The Philippines takes pride in being Asia's only Christian nation; with more than 86 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 6% affiliated with numerous nationalized Christian religious sects, and 2% associated with one of more than 100 Protestant denominations. A strong 4% Muslim minority, clustered on the southern islands of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan, also coexists with the Christian majority. The remaining 2% live in remote mountainous areas and observe non-Western, tribal traditions and customs (Agoncillo, 1969).

According to Robert J. Schreiter (2003), the ongoing association between religion and violence in numerous conflict-torn areas around the world today and in the past has led some to argue that religion's enduring relation to violence is a source of legitimization rather than a resolution of violence. Religion, on the other hand, can be seen as a cause of armed violence, but it also has the power to bring peace and stability in positive ways (Antoni, 2014; Fetzko, 2006). Religion can contribute to the peacebuilding process by providing physical, legal, and cultural services. The spiritual dimension of religious peacebuilding will foster a sense of devotion to peace as well as the transformation of a relationship that has been absent from

mechanical and instrumental dispute resolution models (Abu-Nimer, 2001).

According to Raja Juli Antoni (2014), religion contributes to peacebuilding when it goes through four dynamic interrelated processes through the hermeneutics of peace (HoP), which includes the interaction of four elements: (1) the belief that God and sacred texts have a central position; (2) the dialogue between *external context, external values,* and *sacred text*; (3) the conviction in common and shared religious values; and (4) the recognition of religion as a source of energy and motivation to organize concrete peacebuilding activities. Furthermore, through communicating flexibly and pluralistically across multiple social movements at three layers of leadership: grassroots, middle-range, and top-level leaderships, HoP leads to concrete peacebuilding initiatives. As a result of HoP, faith plays a crucial role in fostering unity and peace on a state, global, and international level.

Catholic Peacebuilding

The Catholic Church since WWII has been a leading religious organization in launching peacebuilding and peacemaking initiatives, and it has grown into a religious institution at the vanguard of the fight for peace and justice based on human dignity (Fetzo, 2006). R. Scott Appleby (2004) notes that Catholic peacebuilders are currently present at every level of the conflict transformation cycle. They operate in areas like peace education and conflict prevention, mediation and conflict resolution, post-settlement social reconstruction, and academies and courts where human rights, including religious freedom, are theoretically grounded and cross-culturally grounded. Moreover, local parishes and inner-city reconciliation and conflict resolution ministries are rapidly becoming training grounds for Catholics interested in entering this burgeoning realm of peacebuilding.

According to William LaRousse (2001), the local Catholic Church in Mindanao is gradually inspired to adopt the principle of interfaith dialogue as a product of the Second Vatican Council, compared to other Catholic institutions in other parts of the Philippines. It revealed the existence of an internal dynamic within the Catholic hierarchical structure. Despite the fact that the Catholic Church is renowned for its rigid hierarchical structure, especially on its theological matters, various cultural, social and political settings of the country and region had led to different interpretations of the Second Vatican Council's theological documents. Since Mindanao is a pluralistic community, inter-religious tensions caused the Catholic leaders in Mindanao to become more open to interfaith dialogue as a means of achieving peace and reconciliation, contrary to Catholic leaders in other areas of the Philippines.

Unlike LaRousse, Jerson Narciso (2013) concentrated on researching the role of the Catholic Church in fostering reconciliation through interfaith dialogue. Narciso examined the role of all formal or official religious institutions in the Philippines that contributed to peacebuilding, including Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID), Ulama League of the Philippines (ULP), and the Bishop-Ulama Conference of the Philippines (BUC). He comprehensively described the origin, vision and mission, and activities that were organized by each religious institution in promoting peace and conflict resolution in Mindanao.

Narciso (2013) also identified the crucial theological concepts within Christianity and Islam that can be utilized as a theological justification for the peaceful resolution of the Mindanao conflict. The Hebrew term *Shalom* which means "the kingdom of God", the Greek term *Eirene* which means "a theological foundation to build peace", and *Tawhid, Taqwa, Jihad, Iman* from Islam which are principles that can be utilized for peace.

Thus, the Catholic Church must be proud of its contribution to the global peacemaking and peacebuilding activities, joining other Christians of various denominations in their struggle to live out their faith's

directives in a way that contributes to the development of local, regional, national, and international processes conducive to peace (Fetzko, 2006). Andrea Bartoli (2004) claims that in today's world, it is impossible to find a single controversy in which no Christian is raising awareness, protecting human rights, educating children and adults, and defending civil society space from aggressive oppression as Christianity connects people all over the world in a remarkable way. The network is vast, constantly transporting people, goods, resources, information, and ideas, allowing for much of today's peacebuilding.

Silsilah Dialogue Movement (SDM)

The Silsilah Dialogue Movement (SDM) was established on May 9, 1984 by Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, Pontifical Insitute for Foreign Missions (PIME), a Catholic priest, along with his Muslim and Christian colleagues. The establishment of SDM was a response to the religious conflict in Mindanao and a manifestation that the conflict could only be resolved through peaceful means, especially through promoting a culture of dialogue. SDM offers a form of dialogue that differs from the secular form of dialogue. By recognizing God as the source of dialogue, SDM envisions a life in dialogue for all Muslims, Christians, and peoples of other living faiths, respecting, trusting, loving one another, and moving together towards a common expression of harmony, solidarity, and peace (Antoni, 2014).

The Arabic term *"silsilah"* translates to a chain, link or genealogical tree. Specifically, the word *"silsilah"* is commonly used in Sufism to refer to spiritual endeavors and experiences that pave the way to God. The choice of D'Ambra of an Arabic and Islamic term for the organization, within the context of the Philippines as a Catholic nation, symbolizes the inclusivity of the organization and D'Ambra's solemn intention to invite Muslims to a sincere interreligious engagement. Moreover, *silsilah*, as a specific transcendental or mystical term in Sufism, is used with the aim to celebrate the diversity of people across religious affiliations because of its very meaning "genealogical brotherhood" regardless of any religious background (Antoni, 2014).

Arguably, the SDM is a religious institution. One cannot deny the critical role that D'Ambra's use of Catholic theology played in considerably influencing the spiritual journey of the SDM. Although high-ranking religious figures from the Muslim and Christian communities are among the SDM's executive bodies and on its board of trustees, SDM has maintained its autonomy as an independent institution that is not structurally linked to the Catholic Church or any Muslim institutions. It seeks to be an avenue for dialogue for everyone, regardless of religious affiliation (Antoni, 2014).

To promote intensely the importance of the culture of peace and dialogue, the SDM initiated three sectoral programmes (Antoni, 2014):

1. Community programme, which strives to give basic services to the grassroots communities, such as providing food and nutrition for children, education, and health services;
2. Sectoral programme or the Silsilah Youth Programme, also called as SilPeace, which aims on promoting friendships and improved relationships among young Muslims and Christians; and
3. Interfaith Council of Leaders (IFCL), which aims to provide an avenue for Muslims and Christian leaders from different sectors and professions in reflecting, expressing, and sharing their views to strengthen interfaith relationships. It also serves as an avenue for anticipating and identifying social and political issues. The IFCL also produces press releases to convey moral messages and apply political pressure to governemnt policies that affect people's lives in Mindanao, like what the Catholic Church does as well.

Space for Peace (SP) in Barangay Nalapaan

Nalapaan is one of the 42 barangays (Avruch& Jose, 2007 as cited in Antoni, 2014) in the Municipality of

Pikit and known as one of the worst conflict-inflictedbarangays in Mindanao. It is strategically situated along the national highway that links Davao City, Mindanao's largest city, and Cotabato City, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao's capital. A rural barangay of 350 households made up of roughly 60% Muslims, 35% Christians, and 5% Manabos/Lumads — Mindanao's indigenous people. This region was historically a battlefield between the AFP and the MILF for around three years. The Rajahmuda war broke out in June 1997, displacing 30,000 civilians. Three years later, in March 2000, President Estrada announced an all-out war, destroying homes and fields, killing civilians, and evacuating 40,000 refugees to Pikit, including those from Nalapaan (Antoni, 2014).

Following these two conflicts, the people of Nalapaan began to think about how to end the cycle of war. On February 1, 2001, the citizens of Nalapaan proclaimed their barangay a Space for Peace (SP) after many consultations, formal and informal gatherings, negotiations, and preparation. This initiative was respected by key conflict players such as the AFP and the MILF. As a result, when the war broke out again in 2003, the residents of Nalapaan did not flee to the Pikit proper, while other barangays did. When the MILF and the Philippine government refused to sign the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008, an ex-MILF general, AmerilUmbara Kato, waged war across Mindanao. People in Barangay Nalapaan stayed peaceful because the area was no longer a battleground; they did not evacuate but instead established evacuation centers for other barangays in the area (Antoni, 2014).

The Nalapaan SP's performance served as a blueprint for the neighboring barangays of Nalapaan. On November 29, 2004, inhabitants from the seven barangays, (including Nalapaan) declared their barangays to be a Space for Peace. It is called the Space of Peace *ginapalad ta ka* that literally translates to "I bless you", and is also an acronym term derived from the first two letters of each Barangay's names: GInatilan, NAlapaan, PAnicupan, LAdtingan, Dalengaoen, TAkepan, and KAlakakan (Antoni, 2014).

According to Antoni (2014), there are two types of Dialogue done in Nalapaan which is Horizontal and Vertical. Horizontal dialogue includes the following:

1. *Dialogue of life* was defined as the regular conversation of everyday citizens in ordinary areas such as marketplaces, fields, towns, and emergency centres. It consists of one-on-one experiences that help present opportunities for building trust among the Nalapaan people.
2. *Dialogue of action* was described as the goal of bringing together people of various religious backgrounds for the greater good of all. Ideas arose from the discussion, which were then enacted as specific social and political activities. One scenario is that Muslims and Christians collaborate to create and maintain an SP in Nalapaan and build a
3. *Dialogue of discourse*, in this matter, does not exclusively apply to scholarly and philosophical dialogue held at conferences or symposia. It is an effort to find appropriate and constructive meanings for religious narratives and rituals, as well as Holy Scriptures, that can be used to reinforce the need for a peaceful settlement. The Culture of Peace (CoP) teaching, which took place many times in Nalapaan, is one example.
4. *Dialogue of religious experiences* allows the Nalapaan community to strengthen the commitment of living side by side, as brothers and sisters. To learn and share about each other's religious views in order to fully understand other faiths. It is clear from the Duyog activities that they are using it as an opportunity to reaffirm their loyalty to the idea that there are three individuals who cannot be divided by war or strife.

   - *Duyog Ramadhan* – celebrating the end of the month-long fast in the Muslim tradition
   - *Duyog Pasco* – celebrating Christmas
   - *DuyogSamayaan* – thanksgiving in the Lumad tradition

When it comes to Vertical Dialogue, it is the ability of religious and community leaders of Nalapaan to

engage in dialogue with national and international agencies and local organizations such as the MILF and the AFP.

Peace Zone (PZ) in Maladeg

In an article written by Benedicto Bacani & Eliseo Mercado (2011), they mentioned the Maladeg Peace Zone as proof that peoples of different faiths can co-mingle peacefully. Maladeg is found in the Municipality of Picong in the province of Lanao del Sur in Mindanao and was considered as an informal peace zone in 1978 (Zones of Peace, 2017). By implementing traditional modes of conflict resolution between the Muslims and Christians who live there, they were able to resolve the long history of clan-revenge violence in Maladeg (Rood, 2005; Bacani & Mercado, 2011).

Aside from prohibiting crimes like armed conflict and gambling, they also have committees that are assigned to resolve and prevent conflicts from happening. Muslims and Christians alike have their own space for worship within Maladeg, separating the two in order to prevent clashes in traditions and cultural differences (Rodil, 2000, as cited in Montiel, Rodil & de Guzman, 2012). The success of Maladeg was large-scale as even neighboring barangays west of Maladeg joined as part of the area (Zones of Peace, 2017). This peace zone also welcomes anyone who wishes to move there as long as they adhere strictly to the ground rules agreed upon by the authorities of Maladeg (Bacani & Mercado, 2017).

Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) A3B Framework

This study utilized the framework provided by the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which is the A3B. The researchers modified some details and applied the framework previously presented by the aforementioned organization to the current situation of religious peacebuilding in Mindanao. The conceptual framework defined interfaith organizations as different from their mono-religious counterparts. This was due to the transformation of religious peacebuilding in Mindanao, wherein many organizations have interfaith roots and have benefited from the *Binding* and *Bonding* efforts of previous generations. As the CRS only used the A3B framework for their projects in twenty barangays in four municipalities in Central Mindanao, the researchers used the framework on a larger scale, including peacebuilders of various faiths and the entirety of Mindanao. The conceptual framework, which can be seen in Figure 1, was further elaborated in the following part of the thesis.
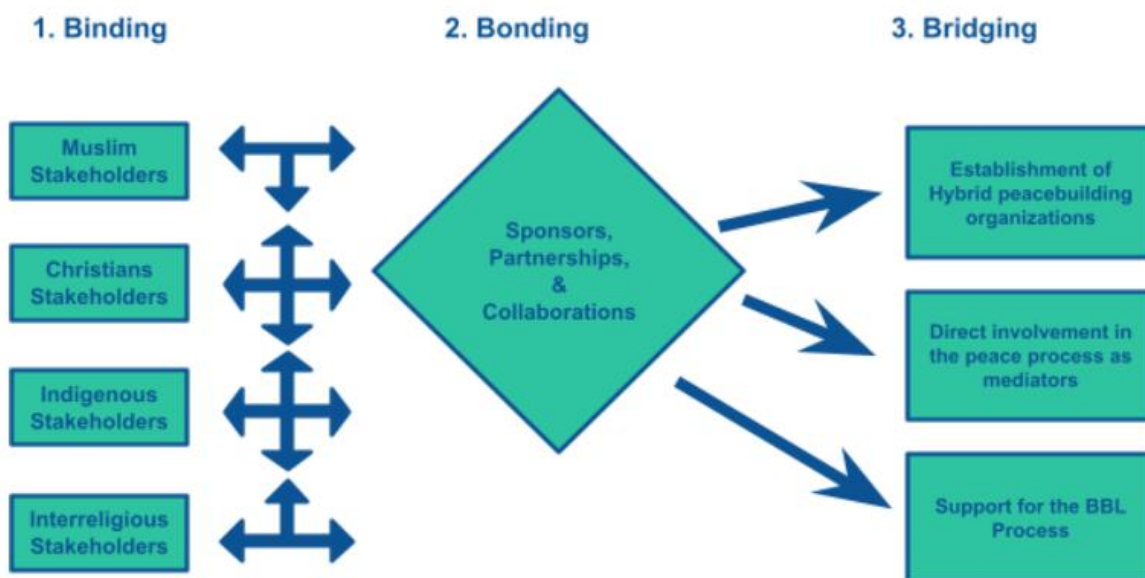

Figure 1. Visual representation of the framework

BINDING STAGE

There have been efforts from grassroots communities and local governmental units in encouraging development and peace in Mindanao. Concentrating on their own religious groups, faith-based organizations and individuals aim to eliminate the prejudices that have been deeply rooted due to the complex conflict in the region. They also aim to develop the faithful as an individual before engaging with other faith groups. For example, Al Husna Foundation conducts activities which center on engaging the Muslim public using the teachings of the Qur'an. On the Christian side, late Fr. Rodulfo Galenzoga forwarded the development of the Basic Eccelesial Communities movement in Mindanao with the establishment of Kristohanong Kasilinganan (KRISKA). IPs, collectively called as *Lumad,* have also organized themselves to serve their own community. An example of this would be PASAKK, or Panaghiusa Alang Sa Kaugalingnan Ug Kalingkawasan, Inc., which has Manobos from Agusan del Sur as members and aims to serve their community by promoting their culture and crops, and by organizing outreach and educational programs.

Additionally, the frequent intermingling of faiths in Mindanao resulted in the formation of interfaith communities. Marriages among Christian and Muslim communities have been historically part of the region and have increasingly integrated the two communities (Lacar, 1984). Through these marriages, families which raise their children with different beliefs have also existed. From the time they were born, the children of a couple with different faiths are exposed to two belief systems. Arizza Nocum, who founded KRIS (Kristiyano-Islam) and is heading Extremely Together-Panaghiusa, is one of those children who grew up in a multi-faith background and is actively participating in both of her parents' faith cultures. The researchers treated peacebuilders like Nocum, along with organizations that were established by interreligious actors, as separate stakeholders from the religious stakeholders listed by the CRS in their A3B framework. Due to the length of their existence, interreligious organizations, like Pakigdait Inc. and KusogMindanaw, may be considered as interreligious stakeholders which actively participate in the *Binding* stage, and have the tendency to continuously evolve to include more sectors of their communities within their organization through the next stages.

The focus of this stage is for stakeholders to participate and to mingle with people who are of the same faith or culture. In the case of interreligious stakeholders, this stage aims to continue the interaction of the stakeholders with people who have interfaith experiences like them. However, caution must be practiced while religious groups are at this stage. Individuals who strongly relate to their religion tend to distance themselves from people who are not part of their religion (Abanes, Scheepers, &Sterkens, 2014). For example, Christians, who are given more political power compared to Muslims and Lumads throughout Philippine history, tend to vote for someone of the same religion as them. They have more trust with the ones from their own socio-religious group. Hence, it is important for religious individuals to transition to the next stage, *Bonding,* in order to avoid possible discrimination and mistrust among religious groups.

Bonding

While Leguro's A3B framework for the *Bonding* stage involves intra-group participation between respective identity groups, the framework's application in this study involves a multidisciplinary and an interdisciplinary approach. As in this stage, sponsorships, partnerships, and collaborations are established. Among these actors include the Tri-people community, interfaith and non-faith organizations, which may also encompass youth groups and organizations. An example, in this case, is the role of Mindanao Peacebuilding institute and Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao, which educates, trains, and builds the capacities of potential peacebuilders in the field of peacebuilding.

Furthermore, it creates a sense of solidarity between institutions and communities. Actors involved in this process interconnect institutions, religious organizations and authoritative bodies of government. This stage

also involves the civil society's participation, with economic-focused seminars, workshops, and training, embracing cultural diversity through advocating its culture through different mediums, along with health-based projects such as food aid, relief operations, and checkups. Moreover, this includes conferences, conventions, and forums with individuals representing various sectors of society. A good example of this is Islamic Relief Services' participation in the *LungadKalilintad*project in 2019, which aimed to retell the history of Mindanao through stories, songs, and visual arts. This came from the word *Lungtad* which means long-lasting in the Lumad dialect, and *Kalilintad* came from a Moro term that means peace. Together, the words symbolize the solidarity of Moro, Christian, and Lumad in Mindanao. This initiative consisted of various activities such as the Pintula Challenge and a series of workshops organized by the Islamic Relief Philippines. Among these, mural paintings were famous among different age groups. In its Facebook post dated July 29, 2019, it shared that one of the walls in Datu Hoffer, Maguindanao, was painted by children, youth and adult participants alike.

The focus on this stage is not on the actors themselves but on the projects that are put into action, with the help of the actors. This takes into consideration that the main objective in this stage is that these projects may be able to lessen the difficulties faced by the people residing in Mindanao and involved in its conflict. Some of these projects can be associated with the Programme for Local Economic Development through Enhanced Governance and Grassroots Empowerment (PLEDGE) and the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), which focuses on peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao's conflict-affected provinces through local economic development.This also includes the exposure of Muslim and Lumad citizens in mainstream media, which happened when the first Muslim newscaster wearing a hijab and traditional dress appeared on a national television in 2012 (Abanes, et al., 2014). This was a symbolic victory for Muslims who viewed this as another step to be seen by the public.

Through this stage, the healing process from centuries long mistrust among religious groups should be addressed. As Pablito Baybado Jr. (2017) puts it, "there is a need for historical healing." Religious leaders should be bridges among their religious groups through interfaith dialogue. It is important To Provide A Proper Foundation For The Next Stage Of The Framework.

Bridging

The last stage is *Bridging,* which corresponds to the institutionalization, policymaking, mediation of all key actors involved, and the support for the BBL process in this study. This stage focuses more on the outcomes of the involved stakeholders and organizations in the peace mediation processes and post-development programs in Mindanao. In Leguro's A3B framework, *Bridging* is equated to interfaith solidarity, protection, and mediation, since it develops trust and cooperation amongst the parties engaged through intergroup activities, and the support on the settlement of land conflicts.

The Duyog Series, which comprises Duyog Mindanao, Duyog Ramadhan, and Duyog Marawi, is one great example of the inter-involvement of all the people of Mindanao and as well as the local government. Wherein in Duyog Ramadan (Accompanying Ramadan), Muslim and non-Muslim leaders will gather in the breaking of the fast at sundown to talk about peace, mutual understanding, and common interests. Moreover, the MILF and MNLF are also in joint efforts with religious and local government institutions to stop the illegal activities in Bangsamoro communities, strengthen community policing to ensure public safety and security, and for the genuine implementation of development programs.

Religious peacebuilding has now evolved to the hybridity of grassroots, religious, and interreligious organizations in Mindanao. The Peace Advocates Zamboanga (PAZ), Al Husna Foundation, Inc., and the Pakigdait, Incorporated Cooperation Circle (CC) is a manifestation of this hybrid, which not only focused on spreading religious beliefs but as well as the promotion of the practice of a culture of peace through education, socio-economic activities, and post-trauma healing sessions. The inclusion of Muslims,

Christians, indigenous people, inter-religious groups, community leaders, the youth, government institutions, and individuals from academia also highlights the process of *Bridging*. Thus, this shows the importance of interdisciplinary processes and solutions for a more inclusive and peaceful Mindanao.

However, it should be noted that without the proper execution of previous stages of the framework, *Bridging* will be forced and performative. If the bias for an individual's religious group will not be nipped from the bud in the *Binding* stage, this will lead to mistrust to people outside of the group. If religious group do not talk about the wounds that rooted from history in the *Bonding* stage, this may lead to continuous violence and mistrust (Baybado, 2017; Austero, Daud &Lubang, 2018). The *Bridging* stage serves to build up from the previous stages. Key features of this stage include collaboration, communication, trust, and open-mindedness among religious groups. It is even more important in this stage to acknowledge the complexity of the current situation of Mindanao, as religion meets with economic, political, and social mobility.

SUMMARY

Religion is often blamed for conflict but at the same time, provides paths towards forgiveness. For Mindanao, it has been both. Throughout its history of exclusion and colonization, religion has been a touchy subject. Although multi-religious communities do exist, the dissonance between Christians and Muslims continued. Lumads were excluded from the colonial narrative. Fortunately, religion developed into an avenue for peace, as seen by the growing number of peacebuilders and advocates in the region. The paper discussed the colonial roots of the Mindanao conflict until the recent developments towards peace. It also enumerated the projects and programs conducted by several religious peacebuilding actors.

The researchers used digital ethnography, and textual and discourse analysis in order to uncover and evaluate the peacebuilding efforts done by religious stakeholders. Religious peacebuilders were found to be involved in most of the aspects of Mindanao life. From worship to education to legislation, religious peacebuilders understood the complexity of the Mindanao conflict and thus, provided equally holistic solutions to the problems. Unfortunately, they still experience challenges in their advocacy, which vary from mistrust among peoples of faith to the current pandemic happening worldwide. Religious peacebuilders are believed to have such an impact on Mindanao's peace process, having evolved to include people of other faiths and disciplines, making the process more inclusive, sustainable, and holistic in the long run. There are impediments in the overall resolution of the conflict ranging from social inequalities against marginalized groups, generalizations against various faith groups, unresolved historical conflicts, land rights issues, violent extremism, to political and economic underdevelopment in the region.

CONCLUSION

The study identified the projects and programs religion-based civil society organizations (CSOs) implemented to aid the peace process in Mindanao. They varied among different areas and organizations, but each contributed to spreading a culture of peace in the region. The religious peacebuilders have shown an awareness regarding the complexity of the Mindanao conflict and addressed the related issues, including social inequality and violent extremism, through their own methods. However, as to any peace efforts, they have some caveats.

Some of these include internal conflicts within the organization that may slow up the consensus decision-making procedure as an institution and the lack of internal dynamics on coordination and cooperation due to the fast pace changing of the environment. There is also the general mistrust from different groups of faith, despite the existence of multi-faith and interfaith organizations and communities. The Mindanao conflict is deeply rooted in the region, which may deter the efforts of peacebuilders, especially the religious actors.

Land, socioeconomic status, education, and many other facets of the conflict cannot be addressed by organizations alone. Fortunately, there are religious actors who enter the world of legislation and development to address these.

This study concludes that religion-based CSOs, as peacebuilding stakeholders, contribute equally, efficiently, and productive to the common actors of peacebuilding in Mindanao. This study also confirms that religion-based CSOs do not fuel further conflict in Mindanao but instead, provide contribution in mitigating or reducing the conflict in Mindanao.

The current nature of religion-based CSOs' peacebuilding stakeholders in Mindanao can be explained by the Binding, Bonding, and Bridging process which was discussed in this paper. The data gathered in this study was presented through the framework. The organizations were seen to have adapted and developed according to the problems they faced. There is a certain awareness of the gravity of their advocacy due to the possible repercussions of their programs and projects. Religious peacebuilders may have stood alone at first but they were able to organize, review their activities, and analyze their shortcomings as organizers. They reached out to other groups and organizations who fight for the same reason as they do and ultimately became a consortium that makes an effort to involve or represent those in other sectors of the society. They are also highly conscious that it is a continuous, arduous process that necessitates willingness, patience, and understanding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The religious peacebuilding activities in Mindanao are complex and interdisciplinary. It involves a myriad of faiths. Unfortunately, the researchers were unable to gather sufficient data regarding the efforts done by the Lumad as they mostly operate offline, so further research in the topic should include the voices of the Lumad. Another recommendation is the further support of local government units to the interreligious and religious efforts toward peace. Communities have mentioned that they preferred the programs established by religious stakeholders due to their grassroots nature. Supporting the organizations and partnering with them will provide LGUs with more information on the topic and will open them to more ideas from the communities themselves. Specifically, programs related to education and economic development have been seen favorable by the people that the CSOs have supported. Discrimination among religious and social groups will lessen when people are taught about the validity and differences among different beliefs. In connection with this, local government units should participate in the interfaith dialogues already happening in Mindanao. This will give them additional context on what is happening in their locality, while acknowledging the role of the government in the current situation of the region. This can be viewed as an effort towards healing the wounds of the past, when the Philippine government fanned the conflict against the Muslims and Lumads in Mindanao.

Additionally, the researchers recommend an in-depth evaluation of the efforts of each of the faiths and regions in Mindanao. This study focused on a generalized view of the Mindanao peace efforts due to the limitations set by the pandemic. Each region and faith have their own efforts that should be emphasized, sustained, and improved. The people working with the people there know best what the citizens need. The researchers also recommend the development of a more inclusive and flexible framework to explain the peacebuilding activities of religious actors in Mindanao. The whole process of religious peacebuilding is far too complex and interconnected to be explained by the currently available literature. This study is to help start the conversation of academically analyzing the Mindanao peacebuilding efforts.

REFERENCES

1. Abanes, Menandro, Scheepers, Peer, &Sterkens, Carl. 2014. Ethno-religious groups, identification, trust and social distance in the ethno-religiously stratified Philippines. Research in Social

Stratification and Mobility, 37, 61–75. doi:10.1016/j.rssm.2014.02.001

2. Agoncillo, Teodoro.1969. A Short History of the Philippines. New York: Mentor Books

3. Antoni, Raja Juli. 2014. The Role of Religion in Peacebuilding in Conflict-Torn Society in Southeast Asia [Thesis]. doi: 10.14264/UQL.2015.183

4. Appleby, R. Scott. 2004. Disciples of the Prince of Peace? Christian Resources for Nonviolent Peacebuilding. In Beyond Violence: Religious Sources of Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. James L Heft, S.M., ed. Pp.113-144, 123. New York: Fordham University Press.

5. Austero, Mitzi, Daud, Mariam, andLubang, Fred. 2018. A History of Struggle for Peace of the Bangsamoro: Shaping the Future Bangsamoro Museum of Peoples' History. URL: https://sitesofconscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NISEA-Toolkit-draft-4.pdf

6. Bacani, Benedicto and Eliseo Mercado. 2011. Catholic Peacebuilding in Southern Philippines. Badaliyya Philippines – Platform for Dialogue & Spirituality May 12. URL: https://ermomi48.wordpress.com/2011/05/12/catholic-peacebuilding-in-southern-philippines/. Last date of access: 8 March 2021.

7. Bartoli, Andrea. 2004. Christianity and Peacebuilding. In Religion and Peacebuilding. Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith, eds. Pp. 147-168, 154-155. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

8. Baybado, Pablito Jr. 2017. Beyond Colonization: The Impact of History in Philippine Interreligious Dialogue. The Journal of Interreligious Studies 20, 38-53.

9. Dellosa, Norberto. 2012. An exposition and Christian ethical evaluation of the conflict between the Bangsamoro people and the government of Philippines [Thesis]. doi:10.4226/66/5A962CA0C6894

10. Fetzko, Mark. 2006. Strategic Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation: The Catholic Contribution to Peace. Beyond Intractability April. URL: https://www.beyondintractability.org/casestudy/fetzko-strategic. Last date of access: 14 March 2021.

11. LaRousse, William. 2001. Walking Together Seeking Peace: The Local Church of Mindanao-Sulu Journeying in Dialogue with the Muslim Community (1965-2000). Quezon City: Claretian Publication, Inc.

12. Leguro, Myla and Nell Bolton (2017). Local Solutions to Land Conflict in Mindanao [Evaluation]. Catholic Relief Services. URL: https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/local-solutions-to-land-conflict-in-mindanao.pdf

13. Montiel, Cristina, Rudy Rodil and Judith de Guzman. 2012. The Moro struggle and the challenge to peace-building in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. In Handbook of Ethnic Conflict; International Perspectives. Dan Landis and Rosita D. Albert, eds. Pp. 71-89. New York: Springer Science+Business Media.

14. Narciso, Jerson. 2013. Christianity and Islam in the Search for Peace in Southern Philippines. Patubas 6(1), 39-55.

15. Ochiai, N. 2016. The Mindanao Conflict: Efforts for Building Peace through Development. Asia Pacific Review 23(2):37-59. doi: 10.1080/13439006.2016.1254364

16. Rood, Steven. 2005. Forging Sustainable Peace in Mindanao: The Role of Civil Society [Policy Study] (17). East-West Center Washington. URL: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/26087/PS017.pdf

17. Schiavo-Campo, Salvatore and Mary Judd. 2005. The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines: Roots, Costs, and Potential Peace Dividend [Social development paper] (31822). World Bank Group. URL: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/701961468776746799/pdf/31822.pdf

18. Schreiter, Robert J. 2003. Grassroots Artisans of Peace. In Artisans of Peace: Grassroots Peacemaking among Christian Communities. Thomas Bamat and Mary Ann Cejka, eds. Pp. 287-300, 287-288. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.